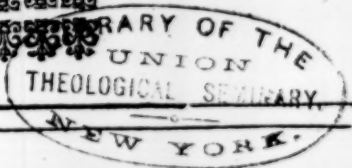


Some Considerations
Concerning the
TRINITY:
AND
The WAYS of Managing that
CONTROVERSIE.

[By Francis Gastrell, D.D., Bishop of Chester]



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**THE
PREFACE
TO THE
READER.**

THIS Discourse was Written
some time ago for the Pri-
vate Satisfaction of the Au-
thor, who thought *that* a pro-
per Season for an Impartial Enquiry into
the Doctrine of the Trinity, *when* several
Persons of different Opinions in that Point
had just before appeared in the Contro-
versie about it, and their Printed Papers
being canvast over again in Conversation,

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had produced many New Remarks upon the same Subject. Which Advantages, together with what he had formerly read, having, as he judged, given him a pretty full comprehension of the Matters in Dispute, he took the following Method of Re-examining that part of his Faith, and Justifying what he believed to his own Reason and Conscience. Some Persons to whom he communicated what he had writ, advised him to Print: Which he had done before now, upon the Judgment of a Great and Learned Man of the Church, lately dead, who was pleased to approve the Papers, without knowing to whom they belonged: But Occasion being given him to fore-see some little Objections, which might, probably, at that particular time, have in some measure obstructed his Good Intentions in Printing them, he thought fit to defer the Publication of them till a more convenient Opportunity, such as he judges this to be, when the Controversie of the Trinity

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Trinity is managed in such a manner as to offend a great many, and satisfy very few; and the Church is like to suffer very much by the too Adventurous Attempts made by some to Vindicate her Doctrines.

Those who pretend to Explain the Distinction in the *Godhead* by *Modes*, *Offices*, *Relations*, and the like, are censured as saying too little, and coming much below the Characters of Distinction to be found in Scripture; though, at the same time they use these Terms, they acquaint us that they use them in a different Sense from any they are taken in, when applied to *Creatures*, and in a sense importing greater Difference, but such as is not conceivable by Human Understanding.

And some of those who call the Three *Divine Persons* Three *Infinite Minds*, *Spirits*, or *Substances*, would not be thought

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to mean by these Expressions, That the Three Persons in the Godhead are as much distinguished from one another as Three *Men*, or Three *Angels* are ; but that the Distinction betwixt them is so great, that no other Terms can reach it, though these do somewhat exceed what they would signify by them : Which Distinction, less than these Expressions, in the common use of them, do import, and higher than any other can come up to, is acknowledg'd likewise to be inconceivable.

Which being observed by the Author of this Discourse, he thought it more Advisable to use no *New Terms* with a Design of Explaining what, by the Confession of Persons of different sides in the Dispute, is not to be rendred more conceivable. And, to Justifie his Opinion in this Matter, he has endeavoured to prove that no *New Terms* can be used to any such purpose. And this, he thinks, he has made very Evident by the Account he
has

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has given of what we can *distinctly conceive*, and what we can *confusedly believe* of the Doctrine of the Trinity; which ought carefully to be distinguish'd in all Disquisitions upon Subjects of this Nature.

As for those who will allow only a pure *Nominal* Distinction in the Godhead; or that apply the Terms *Son* and *Holy Ghost* to meer *Created Beings*, he has only the *Language* and *Design* of Scripture to oppose to them; which seem to *him* utterly irreconcilable to such Notions, and he hopes those general Reflections he has drawn from thence will make this appear so to *others*. But the Opinion of those who make the Persons in the Godhead *as distinct* as *Three Men*, or *Three Angels*, he is sure, both from *Revelation* and *Reason*, is *false*: And that advancing any such Explications of the Trinity, as will fairly bear this Construction, is of such dangerous Consequence, that he hopes he has done some Service to Religion by proving, That *Three Persons*

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in the Godhead as distinct as Three Men, or Three Angels, is not only an Incomprehensible Notion, but an Impossible Thing; which implies a manifest Contradiction to the plainest and surest Principles of Knowledge.

Having given this short Account of the *Author, and his Performance* in this Discourse, I have only this further to acquaint his Readers with, That he desires they would believe him to be a sincere Man, that has a serious Regard for Religion and no other aims behind what he professes: For, whatever his *Arguments* are, he is sure his *Design* is good: And, that his Reasoning may appear so too, he would be glad that They who take up these Papers would give them the Reading over, before they pass any Judgment upon what is advanced in them; For, the Discourse being written in the *Demonstrative way*, where the *Main Conclusions* are establish'd by a long Train of *Preparatory Proofs*, no true Judgment can be made but upon the whole together.

May

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May it please God to make these Endeavours of the Author successful to Satisfie and Unite the Minds of Men in their Belief of the Doctrine of the Trinity ; or may He direct some abler Persons to find out more Effectual Methods of Establishing the *Primitive Faith*, and settling the *Present Peace* of the Church.

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S O M E
CONSIDERATIONS
CONCERNING THE
TRINITY, &c.

THere's no part of the Christian Faith has produced so many Disputes and Controversies, such a numerous Variety of Opinions and Sects, as the Doctrine of the Blessed Trinity. If we consult the large Catalogues of Primitive Heresies, we shall find the far greatest Number of them nothing else but so many several Modes and Ways of Explaining the Common Undivided Nature and Essence of the Trinity, and the different Offices and Operations of each Person.

How far the uncertainty of our Faith in these Points, the many Absurd and Blasphemous Expositions that have been made of them, and the warm and indiscreet Management of contrary Parties, have contributed to the Prejudice of Religion, and the Scandal of its Professors, has been a common Observation and Complaint in all Christian Ages. And several Expedients have been proposed for the Redressing of this Mischief, but all Attempts of this kind have hitherto miscarried.

B

The

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The principal Reason of which I humbly conceive to be this: That those who have laboured in this good Design, have for the most part proceeded upon wrong Measures.

Now, the Methods that have been generally and chiefly insisted upon, are Three, which are all improper, or insufficient, and have therefore proved ineffectual, as will plainly appear upon a particular Examination of each.

1. First then, There are some who are for Reverencing the Mystery of the Trinity without ever looking into it at all, who think it not to be the Subject either of Dispute or Enquiry; imagining every thing of this high and transcendent Nature is proposed to us only as a Tryal and Exercise of our Faith; and the more implicit that is, the fuller do we express our trust and reliance upon God.

Nay, farther, There are those who do not scruple to say, the more Contradictions the better; the greater the Struggle and Opposition of Reason, the greater is the Triumph and Merit of our Faith.

But there's no likelihood of suppressing any of our Doubts or Disputes in Religion this way: For besides the Natural Propension of the Soul to the search of Truth, and the strong and impatient desire we have to know as much as ever we can of what immediately concerns us, 'tis generally and very justly look'd upon both as the Privilege and Duty of Man to Enquire and Examine before he believes or judges; and never give up his assent to any thing but upon Good and Rational Grounds: And therefore 'twould be a very hard thing to persuade the World to stifle and restrain so many Powerful Motives of Action: But should they be farther prevailed upon to go directly contrary to
their

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their Reason, 'twould be much more difficult to Conquer the uneasiness of the Reluctance.

And indeed 'tis well the difficulties of subduing the Understanding are too great to be master'd; For a slight Reflection will serve to convince us, that the necessary Consequences of a blind Resignation of Judgment would be far more Fatal to Christianity than all our present Divisions.

What Blasphemies and Contradictions may and have been imposed upon mens belief, under the Venerable Name of Mysteries? And how easie are Villainous Practices derived from an absurd Faith? This is matter of common Observation, and has brought a just Scandal upon a large Party of Christians, and given occasion to Men of light, undistinguishing Capacities, to deny and scoff at the Saving Truths of the Gospel, because they were accompanied with a ridiculous mixture of Errors.

No doubt therefore we may, and ought carefully to Examine the Faith and Principles we design for the Rule of our Lives, and endeavour to understand all our Religion so far, as to be able to Justifie it, both to our Selves and Unbelievers.

We ought indeed to proceed with all the Caution and Humility imaginable, and take a just Estimate of our *Task* and *Abilities*: But to deny us the Liberty either of using or obeying our Reason, is a suspicious as well as an unjust Restraint.

2. There are others, who call the Doctrine of the Trinity an Incomprehensible Mystery, and yet are at a great deal of pains to bring it down to a Level with Humane Understanding; and are all very earnest to have their own particular Explications acknowledged as necessary Articles of Faith: But the number and

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disagreement of the Expositors plainly discover the vanity of such Pretences.

This has proved so unsuccessful a way, that instead of uniting the different Judgments of Christians in one Point, it has broke the Controversie into a Thousand more: For Zeal and Opposition raising up a great many Assertors of the Common Belief, and every one looking out for some new Terms and Modes of Speech, which should be fuller and more expressive than those in Question, the Differences and Disputes were by consequence proportionably multiplied. For the Terms and Forms of Speech made use of being capable of several senses, and each of them attended with other Accessory Idea's, Mistakes must necessarily arise, and divers new Thoughts be suggested to such whose Heads were employed upon the same Subject: And thus it came to pass, that Defences and Vindications of the Orthodox Faith produced more Heresies.

Wherefore in all such Matters as these, which are too big to be grasp'd, we had better sit down contented with what we have firm hold of, than tire our selves with vain Endeavours to take in more. 'T would certainly be the truest, and the safest way, strictly to confine our selves to *Scripture Expressions*, and never speak of *Supernatural Things*, but in the *Language of Revelation*; which being the proper Standard of all other words that shall be used on these Occasions, 'tis in vain to shift the Measure, when there's never another to be found which can or ought to reach farther.

It may, however, sometimes be necessary to change this Method, and introduce *New Terms* to secure the True Faith against the False Interpretations of such as pervert Scripture. For if Hereticks will make use of *New Expressions* to contradict the received Doctrine, we must

must have New Terms to express the same Truth in, in Opposition to their Hæresie. And in this case the Church may very reasonably require her Members to shew their steady continuance in the *Ancient Faith*, by the use of such Terms as plainly infer their denial of any later erroneous Inventions set up against it.

3. There are a Third sort of Men in the World, who pretend, That there is no Mystery proposed to us as an Object of Faith; and in order to make this of the Trinity appear to be none, they bring a Cloud over the whole Bible, and with strange forc'd Criticisms and Allegories give the very plainest Texts such an unusual Mysteious turn, as neither the Language will bear, nor is any ways consistent with the Design or Character of the Holy Writers.

But this is a very odd preposterous Method of Explaining Scripture, by darkening a great part of it to illustrate the rest, and as ridiculous a Project of healing Divisions, as pulling down a whole side of standing Wall to mend a Breach.

And after all, the *Socinian Hypothesis* seems to me to have more of *Mystery*, and *Contradiction* to Natural Reason in it, than what is objected to the *Catholick Doctrine*.

I am not for clogging the Faith, nor multiplying Mysteries; yet we ought not presently to deny what we do not understand, but soberly, and impartially consider how much we are able to *Comprehend*, and how far we are *obliged to Believe*, what we do not.

The Method therefore I design to observe in the following Discourse, shall be different from any of those now mentioned. I shall not go about to press Men to a *Blind Veneration*, or *Presumptuous Belief* of any thing *without Examination*; or in *Defiance to Reason*: I shall

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not offer to impose any *New Arbitrary Explications* of my own upon other mens Consciences, but confine myself wholly to the usual *warranted Forms* of Expression. I will not wrest and strain Scripture to help out a Private Notion, nor do any thing to betray the Just Rights and Priviledges of our Common Reason; but carefully endeavour to distinguish *How far the Doctrine of the Trinity is a Mystery*, and *how far a Mystery may become an Object of Faith*. From whence I hope to make it appear, that nothing hard or unreasonable is required of us by our Church for the belief of this Article.

In order to which, I shall rank all my Reflections upon this Subject, under these Three Heads of Enquiry.

- I. What it is that perplexes and obscures our Faith in the Trinity.
- II. What is sufficient for Christians to believe concerning this Point:
- III. What ill Consequences can attend such a Faith.

First then, I am to Enquire, What it is that perplexes and obscures our Faith in the Holy Trinity. For before I enter upon a distinct and particular Consideration of the Doctrine it self, 'tis necessary to point out some of the Principal Causes which have occasioned so many False, Absurd, and Ineffectual Expositions of it. And they are these four:

The Prejudice and Bigottry of Men indiscreetly Pious.
The Vanity and Design of such as value themselves upon inventing New Notions, or laughing at the Old ones.

The not discerning or considering the Bounds and Limits of our Knowledge.

And

And lastly, An imprudent Choice of improper ways of Expression.

The two first of these have a general Influence upon all Religious Controversies, but are more especially concerned in this: For there's never more room for Superstitions and Rigorous Impositions, nor fairer Advantages for Cavilling, and drawing absurd Consequences, than where a Mystery is the Subject of Debate.

There are some who are apt to be concerned, and cry out, as if the very Foundations of all Religion were overturning, when any particular Scheme or Notion they are fond of, is called in Question. On the other side, I have no small Reason to believe there are several who strike at Christianity it self, under the Pretence of bringing down the value of Mysteries.

And indeed if we consider the general Temper of Mankind, 'tis no wonder that there's more *Superstition* and *Infidelity* in the World than *True Religion*: For believing every thing, and believing nothing, a sudden Veneration or Contempt of whatsoever is proposed to us, equally gratifie the lazy Inclinations of the Soul, which loves an easie undisturbed course of Thoughts, and is very difficultly brought to endure the Labour of Attention and Enquiry. Nay, of those who seem to have conquer'd this Trouble, there are few who lay themselves out in a free and impartial search of Truth, but are wholly employed in the pursuit of some Notion they have before-hand taken up, and are resolv'd to maintain: They are already determin'd what to believe, and only seek out Arguments to Justifie or Recommend their Opinions to others.

How

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How far these general Reflections are applicable to the present Case, has been hinted already in the beginning of this Discourse, where 'tis very discernible from the Ways and Methods made use of for settling the Doctrine of the Trinity, that Prejudice and Vanity, a false Zeal, and an ill-grounded Contempt have had a large share in the Management of this Controversie.

Another Reason why our Endeavours of Expounding this Point have been vain and unsuccessful, is the want of discerning or considering the Bounds and Limits of our Knowledge; from whence it comes to pass, that oftentimes we strive to soar above our pitch, and imagine we understand some things better than really we do. But especially Men of abstracted Thinking are very apt to deceive themselves with false Idea's, and are firmly perswaded they conceive things distinctly, which they have but a confused Notion of. As for instance; It has been delivered down, as the constant Faith of a long Succession of Eminent Philosophers, that the whole *Substance, Nature, and Essence* of the *Soul* is *wholly and entirely* in *all the Body* considered together, and *wholly and entirely* in *every single Particle* of it. And this is a Notion which at first view has a great appearance of truth and clearness, and is such as the Understanding readily closes with: But if we would strictly and distinctly Examine our selves, what we mean by those Terms, I believe we should be able to give but a very obscure Account of our Opinion; and at last, be forced to confess we understand no more than this by them, That the *Soul is the Principle of all the Operations performed in the Body*. But so it sometimes happens, that we are transported too far in our Enquiries after hidden Truths, till we are lost in Speculation, and vainly think to Fathom the depths of Knowledge.

ledge and Wisdom, without considering the shortness of our *time*. Whereas we ought rather to examine, and find out the Bounds of our Thoughts, know the just extent and compass of our Understanding, and then rest satisfied with what we are *Capable* of, without *desiring to know more than we can, or pretending to know more than we do.*

But further, the Doctrine of the Trinity has suffered very much by the Discourses made about it upon another Account; And that is, that some of the Authors of such Discourses have imprudently made choice of improper ways of Expression: Either perplexing plain Revelation too much with Philosophical Terms and Niceties, or exposing the Faith to contempt, by homely indecent Similies, and disproportionate Comparisons.

Now, to keep clear of all those Rocks I have discovered others to have split upon, I have endeavoured, what I could, to deliver my self from Prejudice and confusion of Terms, and to speak Justly and Intelligibly: And not being yet prepossess'd in favour of any particular Explication, the better to preserve my freedom of Examining the Subject in hand, I have purposely forborn to search the *Fathers, Schoolmen, or Fratres Poloni*, or read over any *later Treatises* concerning this Controversie while I was composing the present Essay, resolving to consult nothing but *Scripture* and my *own Natural Sentiments*, and draw all my Reflections from thence, taking only such which easily, and without constraint offered themselves.

2. And thus having cleared the way, and removed every thing which I thought might obstruct or misguide my Enquiries, I come, in the second place, to consider the Doctrine it self; and Faithfully and Impartially to Examine what is *sufficient for Christians to*

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believe concerning the Trinity, or, which is all one in this case, *what is necessary to be believed*: For certainly he believes enough, and cannot in reason be taxed for a narrow defective Faith, who believes as much as is required of him.

For the better proceeding in which Enquiry, I shall lay down this as an evident Truth, which every Man will grant me, that nothing is *necessary to be believed*, but 1. *what's possible to be believed*; and 2. *what's plainly revealed*.

But here I would be understood, as to the last part of the Assertion, only of such matters which are known to us no other way than by *Revelation*. For in several other cases, I confess, we may be obliged to believe merely upon *Human Testimony*: Nay, even *Revelation* it self, as it is a matter of Fact, claims our Assent upon no higher a ground.

But further, I shall take this for granted too in a Protestant Country, that *Scripture* is the only Standard of all Necessary Revealed Truths: Neither in the present Instance is there any room for a *Traditionary Faith*. For besides that, all the Fathers and Ancient Writers ground their Expositions of the Trinity wholly upon Scripture, I cannot conceive that the Subject is capable of a plainer Revelation, as I shall endeavour to shew more fully in the following Discourse.

We are therefore, in the first place, to consider how far 'tis *possible to believe a Trinity*; and next, to examine *what the Scripture requires us to believe* in this matter.

Now, there are two Conditions requisite to make it possible for us to believe a thing. 1. That we know the Terms of what we are to assent to. 2. That it imply no contradiction to our former Knowledge; such Knowledge I mean which is accompanied with Certainty and Evidence.

First

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First then, we can believe a thing no further than we understand the *Terms* in which it is proposed to us: For *Faith* concerns only the *truth and falshood of Propositions*; and the *Terms* of which a Proposition consists must be first understood before we can pronounce any thing concerning the Truth or Falshood of it; which is nothing else but the *agreement or disagreement of its Terms, or the Idea's* expressed by them. If I have *no Knowledge at all* of the meaning of the terms used in a Proposition, I cannot exercise any Act of my Understanding about it, I cannot say, *I believe or disbelieve any thing*, my Soul is perfectly in the same state it was before, without receiving any new Determination. If I have but a *general confused Notion of the Terms*, I can give only a *general confused Assent to the Proposition*. So my *Faith* will always bear the same Proportion to my *Knowledge* of the Subject-matter to be believed.

To make this plainer by an Instance, suppose I am required to believe that *A.* is equal to *B.* If I don't know either what *A.* or *B.* stands for; or have no Notion of Equality, I believe nothing more than I did before this was proposed to me; I am not capable of any new determinate Act of Faith. All that I can believe in this case can amount to no more than this, That *Something has some respect to something else*; that the Matter I am required to believe, is affirmed by a Person of great Knowledge and Integrity, who ought to be credited in what he says, and therefore the Proposition here laid down is probably true in that sense the Author means. And what am I the wiser for all this? What addition is there made to my Faith or Knowledge by such a Proposition? But farther, suppose I know that *A.* and *B.* stand for *two Lines*, and that by *Equal Lines* is meant *Lines of the same length*; such Knowledge

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ledge can produce only a *general confused belief*, that there is some certain *Line imaginable* just of the *same length with some other Line*: But if by *A.* and *B.* are meant *two right Lines*, which are the *sides* of a *given Triangle*, and I take a Mathematician's Word for it, without demonstration that they are *equal*, or of the *same length*, this is a *particular distinct Act of Faith*; by which I am satisfied of the Truth of something which I did not *believe* or *know* before.

From whence it follows, that *Terms* and *simple Idea's* must be *clearly* and *distinctly* understood first, before we can believe any thing *particular* of the *respects* and *relations* they bear to one another, which is the only *proper Object of Faith*.

Another Condition necessary to render a thing capable of being believed is, that it implies no Contradiction to our former Knowledge. I cannot conceive how 'tis possible to give our assent to any thing that contradicts the plain Dictates of our Reason, and those evident Principles from whence we derive all our other Knowledge.

As for Example: I do not see how any Authority of Revelation can overthrow the Truth of this Proposition, *That the Whole is bigger than any of its Parts*. For

First, I cannot more clearly and distinctly perceive any external Impressions made upon my Soul, nor be more certain that such Impressions proceed from God, than I can perceive and be assured that the *Idea's* I have of *whole* and *part* bear this relation to one another.

Secondly, The nature and constitution of things makes it impossible that this Proposition should be false; for such and such Things or Notions being supposed, such and such Habitudes and Respects must necessarily result from

from them. So long therefore as I have the same *Idea's* of *whole* and *part*, and the same Faculties of Perception, I shall always perceive the same relation betwixt them: And if my *Idea's* of *whole* and *part* were changed, or a new Texture and Frame of Soul given me, I should indeed perceive different relations betwixt these new *Idea's*; but this would by no means destroy the Truth of my former Conceptions, 'twould still be certain, according to the *Idea's* I had before of *whole* and *part*, that the *whole* was bigger than any of its *parts*: Which *Idea's* will always unalterably have the same relation to one another. But

Thirdly, Was it possible this Proposition could be false, considering only the nature of the things themselves, the Nature of God furnishes us with other Arguments of the Truth, and Certainty of it. And

1st. It is not consistent with the Justice, Wisdom, or Goodness of God, to require us to believe that, which, according to the Frame and Make he has given us, 'tis impossible for us to believe: For however some Men have advanced this absurd Paradox, that God can make Contradictions true, I am very certain, that upon an impartial Trial of their Faculties, they would find 'twere perfectly out of their power to believe explicitly, and in the common Sense of the Terms, that a Part can be bigger than the Whole it is a Part of. But

2^{dly}, Admitting it possible for us to be deceived in such Propositions which have a constant, uniform, and universal appearance of Truth and Evidence, this would destroy all manner of Certainty and Knowledge, and leave us wholly in Darkness, Ignorance, and Despair; or, which is more Injurious to the Divine Goodness to imagine, under an absolute necessity of being deceived: For 'tis not only impossible for me to believe, that such

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a Proposition as this, That the *Whole is bigger than any of its Parts* is false ; but I cannot deny my *positive express assent* to it as true : The Light and Evidence in this Case is so clear and strong, that I am not at Liberty so much as to *suspend* my Judgment.

3dly, 'Tis Blasphemy to think, that God can contradict himself ; and therefore *right Reason* being the Voice of God, as well as *Revelation*, they can never be directly contrary to one another.

Now to apply all this to the present Case ; suppose I am required to believe, That *One and the same God is Three different Persons* : I only suppose it here, because I have not yet proved *how far*, and *in what sense*, we are *obliged to believe a Trinity*. If this, I say, be the Proposition I am required to give my assent to, 'tis plain, by what has been proved before, that I can believe it no farther than the *Terms*, of which it is made up, are *known and understood*, and the *Idea's* signified by them *consistent*.

In order therefore to form a *determinate Act of Faith* in this Point, I must carefully examine my self what Notions I have of *God*, of *Unity* and *Identity*, *Distinction* and *Number*, and *Person*.

As to the Notion of a *Deity*, 'tis true indeed I have not a *full and adequate Idea of God*, neither is my Soul capable of it ; but what Conceptions I have of his Nature and Perfections, are, according to my Apprehension, so far clear, as to enable me truly and justly to determine which of those distinct *Idea's*, I have in my Mind, are applicable to him, and which are not. And such a Knowledge of the Divine Nature as this, is a sufficient direction of my Faith in any Proposition concerning God, where I clearly understand all the *Idea's* attributed to him.

In the next place therefore, I am to consider what Notions I have of *Unity* and *Identity*, *Distinction* and *Number*.

And here I confess I am at a Loss how to deliver my self, these being some of our *first and most simple Idea's* which are so clear of themselves, that I cannot find clearer to explain them by.

For this is certain, that every Man is conscious to himself, that he has a power of *perceiving* and *comparing his Perceptions*, and consequently must know when any thing is presented to his Mind; whether it be perceivable at *one entire view*, and whether the Object have *one uniform appearance* or not: He must be also sensible in a succession of *Idea's*, when the *same* Appearances are repeated again, and how often the Representation is *varied*.

However, notwithstanding the Clearness of these Notions, with respect to what passes in our own Minds, we are not able to make true and distinct Judgments of the *unity* or *multiplicity* of things without us: For it does not follow, that what is represented to the Soul at once, under one *Idea* or Appearance, should, according to the *reality of things*, be *one undivided nature*, neither can it be inferred, that what is represented to the Soul under *different Idea's* are so many *distinct real Beings*: For there are some *Idea's* purely of the Soul's own making, and not copied from any external Patterns, where there are a great many particular real Beings, of different kinds and natures, comprehended under one Representation: Thus all the Hills, Plains, Rivers, Trees, and Towns, &c. which the Eye can reach from such or such a Point, we put into one Picture, and call it a Landskip or Prospect. Thus does the Soul enlarge its View to all the Works of God and Nature;

Nature ; it takes in the whole Creation at a Thought, and calls it *World*. On the other side, the *real Natures*, and *Essences of Things*, which are allowed to consist in a *simple undivided Unity*, are not conceivable by us at once, but at *different Views*, by *different partial Conceptions*, which the Soul afterwards compounds and calls by *one Name*. Thus when we endeavour to comprehend the Nature and Essence of what we call Man, we form, at different times, several confused Notions of *Substance, Body, Life, Sense, and Reason* ; every one of which is a *complicated Idea*, and to be resolved into a great many others more simple and distinct : As for instance, I must form a great many *Idea's* of particular Actions, and the Modes, Differences, and Relations of them, before I can have any tolerable knowledge of what *Reason* is ; and so for the rest.

All therefore that we understand of the unity of things without us, is this : When we perceive any Object in a *continued Position*, bounded and fenced out from other things round about it, all within such Terms and Limits we call *One* : And then again, observing a great many different Actions, produced in and by such an Object, we judge all these Actions and Operations to proceed from one *common Principle*, in some such manner as Streams from a Fountain, or several Lines from the same Centre. And whatever we thus judge to be *One*, tho' a great many Thoughts and Conceptions go to the forming of such a Judgment, we endeavour, as well as we can, to represent to our selves under *one Idea or Appearance*, tho' the Representation be often very confused and indistinct. And this we do, as supposing it wholly and uniformly conceivable at one single View, were it not for the Imperfection of our Faculties : Which Supposition is not without good Ground ; for
this

this we have plain Experience for, that when any visible Object is of such a magnitude, or in such a situation that the Eye cannot receive the whole Image of it at once, we take it in at different times, from different points of Sight; and yet for all this, we find no more Reason to doubt of the real Unity of such an Object, than of any other, whose Image came into the Soul entire at one Act of Vision; for we easily conceive there may be other Organs of Sight, which would reflect the whole Object together: And from thence we conclude further, that there may be also some other Mind more perfect than ours, which perceives that as one simple *Idea* which we cannot apprehend, but by a union of several different Conceptions: From whence it follows, that the most perfect Mind, which is God, is the only true and proper Standard of all Unity and Distinction.

The Summe of all my Thoughts is this: What is meant by *one* or *more*, the *same* or *different Idea's* is better to be conceived by inward Reflexion, than can possibly be explained by Words.

Such an *Idea*, which is not distinguishable into different Appearances, I call a *simple Idea*.

When I have any Thought or Perception, which is resolvable into several *Idea's*, I call this a *complex* or *compounded Notion*. And hence I term any Being *simple* or *compounded*, according as it is perceivable by some Mind, under one *simple Appearance*, or a *complex Idea*.

Whether my *Idea's* are agreeable to the real *Natures of Things*, or those *original Patterns* in the Mind of God, I cannot certainly know; but when they are the *same*, and when they differ from one another, I plainly perceive; tho' I cannot always judge of the *Identity* or *Distinction* of Things, according as they are represented

ted to my understanding, under the *same* or *different* Appearances: For here I should be sometimes mistaken too, as 'tis plain I often must, if I judg'd of the *real unity* or *multiplicity* of Things by my own *Idea's*.

The Notions we have of the unity of Things without us, come the nearest that can be imagin'd to our *Idea's* of *Point*, and *continued Extension*; one of which represents *simple* unity, the other *compounded*; the one we apply to what we call *spiritual* Beings, the other to *material*: For 'tis certain the Conception we have of Body, can never furnish us with any *Idea* of *simple* Unity.

By a *Spirit* then we mean something without extension, and consequently indivisible, capable of performing some such kind of Actions, which do, in some manner or degree, resemble those we are conscious of: But what that is, from whence I suppose such Actions to proceed, I have not the least conception of; for all that I conceive, is only several *Idea's* of different particular Actions, which no more express the *Idea* of that Principle from whence they spring, than the *Idea's* of several particular Lines express the *Idea* of that Point they are drawn from.

All that we can perceive or imagine of *corporeal* Unity, is nothing else but a Connexion or joint Position of several Bodies, which, according as it is *more* or *less* perceivable, according to the *simplicity* or *multiformity* of the *Figure* resulting from it, and the *easiness* or *difficulty* of Separation, makes several degrees of *Union*, which all receive the common Denomination of *Unity*.

Now as *Extension*, by reason of its *perpetual divisibility*, cannot give us a true Notion of *simple* Unity, so neither can I have any distinct knowledge of *Union* or *Composition*,

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Composition, abstracted from all Considerations of *Extension*. I do not understand how a Mind and Body are united, any otherwise than that I perceive such and such spiritual Actions produced within the Compass of such a Body which I call *One*: Neither am I able to comprehend the Union or Separation of Two *Spiritual Beings*, without considering them as in the same or different *Localities*; for I have not distinct Ideas of several *Spiritual Natures*, nor, if I should perceive the several *Operations* of different *Spirits*, could I distinguish the several *individual Beings*, or *Principles*, they proceeded from: For who is there that, if all the Thoughts and Motions of the Souls of several Men were communicated to him, could tell which proceeded from which? Nay, we cannot tell what *difference of Actions* is sufficient to determine the *different kinds of Principles* they proceeded from; neither can any *Co-operation*, or *Consent of Actions*, make us conceive a *spiritual Union*, without conceiving the *same Term of Action* too. For suppose *two Souls* were so exactly framed alike, that they always thought and will'd the same Things at the same times, and were conscious of each other's Thoughts and Actions, if they were put into *different Bodies*, 'tis plain we could not properly say they were *united* or *made one*: And again, supposing they were in the *same Body*, we could not possibly conceive them to be *two*, any otherwise than we knew them capable of a *separate Existence*; that is, if we examine our Thoughts honestly, of a separate *Ubi*, in different Bodies, or elsewhere: Not that I think *local Presence*, or *Determination*, is any way contained within the Idea of a *spiritual Being*, but it helps us to conceive it better, and discourse more distinctly about it. And, if we observe

it, there are several cases where our *Conceptions* and *Judgments* must necessarily differ.

These then are all the kinds of *Unity* and *Distinction* I can possibly imagine; namely, in *Idea*, *Principle*, and *Position*. Whatever else is called *Unity*, is more properly termed *Agreement*, the very Notion of which implies a *distinction* in some of the fore-mentioned kinds.

Identity is nothing else but a repetition of *Unity*, as *Number* is of *Difference*, with the judgment of the Understanding upon it.

What *Personal Unity* and *Distinction* are, will be easily understood by explaining the word *Person*, which signifies one of these two things; either a *Particular Intelligent Being*, or an *Office*, *Character*, or some such complex *Notion applicable to such a Being*. In the first sense *one Man*, or *Angel*, is *one Person*, and *several Men* or *Angels* are *several Persons*. In the second sense of the word there may be so many *Persons* as there are different Combinations of the *Actions*, *Relations*, and *Circumstances* of *Intelligent Beings*.

And thus having given an Account of the meaning and signification of the Terms in which we are required to express our Faith, we are next to Examine, how far, and in what sense we can believe this Proposition, That *One and the same God is Three different Persons*.

Now 'tis certain, that if those before-specified are all the Notions we are able to frame of *Unity* and *Distinction*, then God must be *One* and *Three* in some way or manner there laid down, or else in some other way or manner not conceivable by Human Understanding.

First then, let us see how and in what manner God can be *One* and *Three*, according to those Notions our Souls have framed of *Unity* and *Distinction*.

And

And here 'tis granted on all hands, that nothing can be *One* and *Three* in the *same manner* and *respect*: We cannot conceive a thing to be in One determinate Position or *Ubi*, and in Three separate *Ubi's* all at once; We cannot conceive that One Principle or Nature should be but One, and yet Three different Principles or Natures too; or that any Object should be truly and adequately represented to any Mind or Understanding under One Idea, and truly and adequately represented under Three different Ideas. 'Tis impossible to believe any thing of this kind, because it implies a plain Contradiction to the clearest and most certain knowledge we can have of Unity and Distinction; so that if *One* may be *Three* in the same respect 'tis *One*, then *One* and *Three* must stand for other Ideas than we conceive when we pronounce these words; and if so, they ought to have other Names, and not be called *One* and *Three*.

Since therefore we cannot say, that God is One and Three in the *same respect*; in the next place let us Enquire, In *what different respects* this may be affirmed of him. Now, as to the *Unity* of God, this is easily believed and acknowledged, as being very agreeable to all our other Notions of the Deity. The chief difficulty lyes in assigning the *Distinction*: In attempting which, the best and clearest way of proceeding will be by going over the several kinds of Distinction before-mentioned.

I will begin with that of *Position*: And here 'tis plain at first sight that we cannot possibly conceive God under any *difference of Position*; we cannot exclude Omnipotence from any imaginable point of space: 'Tis the limited Powers and Faculties of created Beings which are the Foundation of all *Local Distinctions*: And therefore when we endeavour to represent God to our thoughts

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thoughts in this manner, we consider him as *Omnipresent* ; and I can no more conceive *Three Omnipresents* , than I can conceive *Three* straight Lines drawn between the same Points.

But though there can be but *One undivided Omnipresence* , may there not be *Three Infinite Beings Co-equal* to one another, and *Commensurate* to *One Infinite Space* ? This is far above my Conception too : *Infinite* swallows up all my thoughts. Whatever Idea we apply this Term *Infinite* to, I think it impossible to apply it to another of the same Denomination : As for Example ; If I apply it to Power, I cannot consider it as applicable to more than *One Infinite Power* : For *Infinite Power* includes all the Possibilities of Action ; so that to conceive more than *One Infinite Power* , would be to conceive more Power than is possible ; which is a gross and palpable Absurdity. And therefore we cannot conceive *Three Infinite Beings distinct* from one another, any more than *Three Infinite Powers* , or *Three Infinite Spaces* , because all *Distinction* implies some *Limitation* , and *Limitation* is a Contradiction to *Infinity* . We can indeed conceive *Infinite Power* , as in some manner bounded by *Infinite Wisdom* , *Justice* , *Mercy* , or the like ; but in no wise as limited by any other Power. We cannot therefore conceive one *Infinite Being* as bounded by another *Infinite Being* ; for then we should conceive *Infinite Power* limited by another Power, and the like of all other Attributes, which are the same in both : For the Notion of an *Infinite Being* includes in it all the imaginable kinds of *Infinite Perfection* .

But if we say, there are *Three Infinite Beings* , and all the *Perfections* of each are *coincident* , what ground can we have for *such a Distinction* ? Not so much, to use the former Instance, as for that of three
straight

straight Lines between the same Points; for there the different times of describing the same Line may in some manner help us to form a confused Conception of different Lines: But 'tis not in the Power of the Soul to represent to its self *Three Eternal Beings* of *Coincident Perfections*. Here's nothing for the Imagination to lay hold of, no manner of ground to deceive our selves into a confused belief of such a Distinction. And therefore I do not see how 'tis possible for us to believe there are *Three distinct Principles or Natures* all of the *same Infinite Perfections*, which together we call God.

And if there be but *One Omnipresent, Infinitely Perfect Being*, how can he be truly and fully represented to any Mind under *Three different Idea's*? The truth of an Idea consists in its Agreement and Conformity to the Original it represents; And if so, how is't possible there should be *Three Idea's* exactly and adequately conformable to the same Original, and yet different from one another? Either these Differences found in the Idea's are not in the real Pattern, and then the Representation is false; or they are, and then the Unity of the Object is destroyed.

'Tis true, indeed we do often apply different Idea's to the same individual Object; but these are either *Partial and Inadequate Conceptions* of the *Nature and Essence* of it; or Expressive of something *Accessory and Extrinsecal* to the Nature of the thing, such as *Modes, Circumstances, and Relations*.

Those Partial Conceptions we frame of the Divine Nature are what we call the *Attributes* of God: Which, how different soever from one another in our thoughts, are all necessarily included in the simple Idea of God; and therefore cannot be the ground of such a Distinction as we are now enquiring after. For when I say, that God
is.

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is Holy, Wise, or Powerful, I only say that *explicitly and in part*, which I said *implicitly and in full*, when I pronounced the Name of God; and the meaning of such Propositions is no more but this, That a Holy, Wise, Powerful Being, of all other Infinite Perfections is Holy, Wise, Powerful, &c. All which Perfections, though considered separately under different Appearances by our imperfect Faculties, being really but one simple Idea, can be applyed to but one *Single Person* in the first sense of the word *Person*, as it signifies a particular *Intelligent Being, Nature, or Principle*; and that for the Reasons just now mentioned concerning the Conformity of Idea's with their Patterns.

From whence it follows, that according to the Notions we are capable of framing of *Unity* and *Distinction*, which I have particularly examined, with Reference to the Holy Trinity, all the *Personal Distinction* we can conceive in the Deity must be founded upon some Accessory Idea's Extrinsecal to the Divine Nature; a certain Combination of which Idea's makes up the Second Notion signified by the word *Person*.

And if we fairly and impartially Examine our own Thoughts upon this Subject, we shall find, that, when we name God the *Father*, we conceive the Idea of God so far as we are capable of conceiving it, as Acting so and so, under such *Respects* and *Relations*; and when we name God the *Son*, we conceive nothing else but the same Idea of God over again under different Relations; and so likewise of the *Holy-Ghost*.

But if this be all that is meant by *Trinity in Unity, Three Persons, and One God*, where is that stupendous Mystery so much revered and adored by some? What becomes of the great Difficulty and Obscurity complained of by others? What is it that has puzzled

the

the Understandings, and staggered the Faith of so many Learned and Inquisitive Men in all Ages since this Doctrine was first delivered? This is an invincible Prejudice against the Account now given, and indeed against any other Explication whatsoever that has nothing in it hard to be understood, or believed: For how can it be imagined that what has passed for a Mystery these Sixteen Hundred Years, should now at last be comprehended as plainly as a common ordinary Notion?

But if this Account of the *Trinity* be too easie, and falls far short of those High Expressions of Distinction found in Scripture (as I think it does) and no other grounded upon any Notions our Souls have framed of *Unity* and *Distinction* can be true or consistent (as I have before particularly proved) then it necessarily follows, that God must be *One and Three* in some way or manner not conceivable by Humane Understanding.

And what we are to believe in this case is the Subject of my next Enquiry; which I am perswaded may very easily and quickly be resolved: For if we are fully satisfied from Revelation, that these Terms, *One and Three*, may, and ought to be affirmed of God, but not in any sense of the words we are *here in this present state* capable of conceiving. And moreover, if it be true, as I have already shewn it is, that we can believe a thing no farther than we understand the Terms in which it is proposed to us; 'tis plain from hence that all we can possibly believe in the matter of the Trinity is, That *One and the same God* is *Three* in some way or manner we are not able to comprehend. And if we are sure we cannot comprehend what this Distinction is whereby God is *Three*, in vain do we look out for Terms to express something which we have no

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manner of Conception of. Whatever words we use, whether *Person*, *Hypostasis*, or any other we can invent, or Languages furnish us with, they all signifie the same thing; that is, some kind of Distinction we do not understand. And we may rack our Thoughts, tire our Imaginations, and break all the Fibres of our Brain, and yet never be able to deliver our selves clearer.

All therefore that we can *know* of the Trinity by *Reason*, can amount to no more than an *Obscure confused Knowledge*, which we are forced to express in general and *abstracted* Terms, because we are sure no other reach our thoughts, though these are not sufficient to explain all we mean by them.

Nor is this to be wonder'd at, that we should have confused Notions of things which no particular Idea's our Minds are furnish'd with can render clearer to us: For if we consider the Degrees and Limits of our Knowledge, and take a strict Survey of our whole stock of Thoughts, we shall find there are very few things that we know fully and distinctly. Most of our Notions differ only as *more or less confused, more or less general*. There is a certain Scale of Knowledge, wherein every thing is so fitted and proportioned to our Faculties, that we cannot descend below such a determinate pitch in our Conceptions or Explications of any Object proposed to us.

As for instance; suppose a Blind-Man has a desire to know what Colour is; 'tis certain he can never form a true distinct Idea of it; but yet he is capable of a general confused Knowledge, which wants but one degree of Particularity to be clear and perfect Conception. He may know that Colour is not any *Substance*, but some *Mode* or Determination which owes its Existence and

and Support to some other Being ; that it is not Extension, or any other Accident or Quality perceivable by any of the Senses he enjoys : He may further be made to understand, that it is some kind of *Sensation*, produced by the impressi^on of other Bodies upon that part of a Man's which is called *the Eye*, which other Men perceive though he does not. Now 'tis plain that such a Man knows a great deal of the Nature of Colour, more by far than another Blind-Man who has not made the same Enquiries and Reflections about it ; and so much as will secure him from having any other Idea imposed upon him for that of Colour, which is so distinguished and circumstantiated to him, that, should he now receive his sight, he would presently acknowledge the marks before described to him. And yet after all, it may be truly said, while he continues blind, he has no manner of Idea of Colour, because he has no distinct Idea of that particular kind of Sensation to which his general Idea's are applied. And therefore he can go no lower in his Explications of the Notion he has of Colour : For if he explains it by any Sensation which he receives from his other Senses, the Idea's he has then in his Mind are indeed more particular and distinct, but the Judgment he makes upon them must be utterly false, whereas before, his Knowledge was only general and confused, but yet true.

I have made choice of this plain, familiar Instance of Sense, to shew the unreasonableness of those who in higher Speculations complain that the terms brought to explain them are too *general and abstracted* ; and demand a further Explication of what we cannot possibly know beyond such a degree of Particularity, which the Terms already made use of, do express.

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In vain therefore, and unjustly, are we urged to explain the *Doctrine of the Trinity* more particularly, when we have brought it down to the utmost Particularity we are capable of conceiving, and at the same time freely acknowledge, we don't know it so distinctly as 'tis capable of being known.

For then only is the Use of *general abstracted Terms* to be condemned, either when the subject we are upon will admit of a more particular and sensible Explication; or, if it will not, when by too much Refining and Abstracting, we deceive our selves, and think some Terms we have found out make the Thing clear to us, tho' we have not really more distinct Conceptions of it than we had before, and at the same time these very Terms make it more obscure and difficult to others. And this is what I remarked before as a Prejudice to be avoided in an impartial Search after Truth.

But so long as we acknowledge we have only a *general confused Notion* of the *Trinity*, or such a *Three-fold Distinction in the Godhead*, as is consistent with the *unity of the Divine Nature*, we may be allowed to explain this Notion in *general abstracted Terms*; because we lay no greater a Stress upon the *Terms* than they will truly bear, and require only a *Faith* proportionate to our *Knowledge*; that is, a *general confused Faith*, which we expect a clearer and more distinct Revelation of hereafter.

And thus I have dispatched the first Branch of my Discourse, wherein I propos'd to consider how far 'twas possible for us to believe a Trinity.

II. I come now to my Second General Enquiry,
viz. What it is the Scripture requires us to believe in
 this

this Matter ? For a distinct Resolution of which Question, I shall observe the following Method :

First, I shall barely and positively lay down the Doctrine of the Trinity, so far as I judge it expressly contained in Scripture.

Secondly, I shall endeavour to prove the Truth of what I assert.

Thirdly, I shall consider the particular Additional Explications that have or may be given of the Scripture-Account of this Article.

1. In speaking to the First, it must be allowed, that there is no such Proposition as this, That *One and the same God is Three different Persons formally*, and *in Terms*, to be found in the Sacred Writings either of the *Old or New Testament* : Neither is it pretended that there is any Word of the same Signification or Importance with the Word *Trinity*, used in Scripture, with relation to God. There is one Text which plainly enough affirms, without the help of Inference or Deduction, that *God is Three and One* : But this being a disputed Passage, and no where else repeated in the same or the like Terms, I shall not insist upon it. Nor do I think such a Trinity as we profess to believe, stands much in need of the Support of this Text ; the Matter and subject of our Faith in this Point being frequently, largely, and circumstantially mentioned ; and, as it appears to me, interwoven into the very Design of the Scriptures.

Now the Summ of all that the Scriptures *plainly* and *expressly* teach concerning a *Trinity*, is this : That there is but *One only God*, the Author and Maker of All Things ; but that *One God* ought to be acknowledged

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ledged and adored by us, under those *Three different Titles* or *Characters* of *Father, Son, and Holy Ghost*. Which Terms, whatever they signifie, according to my Judgment, upon a fair and impartial Consideration of all Circumstances that can determine their Sense, are evidently applied to God in many Places of Holy Writ; and consequently are truly and properly applicable to him.

2. The Proof of which Assertion is the Second Thing I undertook.

But here I find my self forestalled by the successful Endeavours of a great many Learned Men, who have carefully and nicely examined every Text that can be brought, either for the Establishment, or Confutation of the Doctrine of the Trinity. I shall not therefore trouble my Reader with a particular detail of all their Arguments; but only acquaint him truly and fairly what were the chief Motives which influenced and disposed me to make such a Judgment as I have, just before, declared.

Now the Reasons which determined my Opinion in this Matter, were such as freely offered themselves upon an unprejudiced reading of Scripture, and considering the Design, Connexion, and Analogy of those Writings: And I am apt to believe, if any Man else took the same Method, and considered Things together, and not only in loose Texts and Passages, the first Result of his Thoughts would be the same, *viz.* These Terms, *Father, Son, and Holy Ghost*, must all be so understood, as to include the same God in their Signification; and that any other Sense or Explication of the Words, would be attended with greater Difficulties.

But

But this being a Reflexion which is founded upon the Agreement and Coherence of all the Parts of Scripture, 'twould be a very improper and ineffectual Design to go about to confirm the Truth of it from some particular Passages. Omitting therefore all those Texts, which are a great many, where any of these Terms, *Father, Son, or Holy Ghost*, appear to be directly affirmed of God, according to a fair Construction of the Words, I shall only observe Two or Three Passages from the History of our Saviour and his Gospel, which, to my Apprehension, do as strongly prove what I have advanced as the most formal Expressions, and are less liable to be perverted by the Criticisms of Language.

The first Observation I have to make, concerns the common Forms of *Baptism, Salutation, and Blessing*, used in several Places of the *New Testament*.

Now these are Matters no way controverted: That our Saviour commanded his Disciples *to go and teach all Nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost*. That St. Paul makes use of such Salutations as these: *The Lord be with you; The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all; Grace be to you, and Peace from God the Father, and from our Lord Jesus Christ*: And particularly closes his Second Epistle to the *Corinthians* with this ~~larger~~ and fuller Blessing; *The Grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Love of God, and the Communion of the Holy Ghost be with you all*. From whence I infer, that all these Terms, *Father, Son, and Holy Ghost*, signify God; because I cannot possibly conceive 'tis agreeable to the Nature of the Christian Religion, that the Ministers of it should *Teach, Baptize, or Bless* the People in any other Name but *God's*.

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It cannot be imagined but the People must equally believe in those, in whose Names they are *Baptized* or *Bless'd*: They must believe that those, who are call'd upon to bestow Graces and Blessings upon them, are able to give what they are called upon for. And whatever is meant by *Baptizing in the Name* of the *Father, Son, and Holy Ghost*, it seems very plain that these Three are all equally concerned in what's done in that Sacrament. Whether by this Form of Baptism be signified on the Minister's Part, the *Authority* or *Commission* by which he acts in his Administration; or whether on the Part of the Person baptized, be meant any *Acknowledgment* or *Confession, Submission* or *Dedication* of himself; or whether this Phrase *in the Name*, or, as in the Greek, *into the Name*, does imply all this, and more, the whole Force and Importance of the Expression, does in the same Extent belong to *Father, Son, and Holy Ghost*. The *Power* and *Authority* here received, is derived from all Three: They are all to be acknowledged as *Authors of our Salvation*; all *infallible*, and to be *believed* in what they Teach; have all the same Title to our *Submission* and *Obedience*, and are Joint-Parties in that Covenant we make in Baptism.

The Inference from hence is very Plain and Easie: That if *any one* of these Terms signifie *God*, they must all Three signifie *God*; and if all Three signifie *God*, they must all Three signifie *one and the same God*; for *God* is but *One*. Now that the *One Supreme God*, the Lord and Maker of All Things, is here meant by the Word *Father*, is a Thing not questioned; and therefore *Son, and Holy Ghost*, are Terms expressive of the same *Divine Nature*.

Should we but suppose the contrary, That by *Son* was meant only a *meer Man*, or some *Heavenly Being*,
of

of highest Rank under God; and by *Holy Ghost* was signified only some created Spirit, inferior to the Son, or the Power, Efficacy, Love, Favour, or Vertue of God how strange would such a Form of Baptism appear? *I Baptize thee in the Name of God, Peter the Apostle,* and the Power or Love of God; or, *I Baptize thee in the Name of God, Michael the Archangel, and Raphael a Ministering Spirit.* There needs no more but a bare Mention of such an Exposition to shew the Falseness of it: What absurd Consequences may be drawn from it, I shall leave to every Man's particular Reflexion.

Another Thing which mightily confirmed me in this Belief, that the *Father, Son, and Holy Ghost*, so often named in Scripture, are *One and the same God*, under those *Three different Appellations*, was this, That the Son, who is the same with him that is in other Places called *the Lord*, and *the Lord Jesus Christ*, and sometimes only *Jesus*, or *Christ*, was worship'd with a *Religious Worship* by those that followed him and embraced his Gospel: For if he that was called the *Son of God*, or *Christ*, was thus to be worship'd, it plainly and evidently follows from hence, according to all the Notions we have of God and Religion, either from *Nature* or *Revelation*, that the Son was also God, the same true and only God with the Father.

And if the Son be allowed to be God as well as the Father, it will be easily admitted that the *Holy Ghost* is so too, who appears in Scripture invested with all the same Characters of Divinity: For *Father, Son, and Holy Ghost*, are as consistent with the Unity of the Godhead, as *Father and Son* only; and besides, there's greater difficulty in conceiving the Son to be God, than the *Holy Ghost*, because of his *Humane Nature*. But

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that he was *God manifest in the Flesh*, is, I say, apparent from the *divine Worship* that was pay'd to him: For that God only is to be worship'd, is an evident Principle, as well as an indispensable Duty; and I can as soon believe a thing *to be*, and *not to be*, as that any thing that is *not God* should be worshipped as *God*.

Now that Christ received the Honour and Worship due to God only, is plain from abundance of Places of Scripture, where we find he was not only adored with all the outward *Expressions of Reverence and Devotion*, but confess'd and acknowledged to be God by an Application of the *Divine Attributes* to him, such as agree only to God, and are incommunicable to any other, as might be proved at large if it had not been done already: But this being fully insisted upon by others, I shall only name Two Passages to this Purpose; the one, *Phil. 4. 13.* the other, *Act. 7. 59.* which, if there were no other, are of themselves sufficient to shew what the Faith of the first Christians was: For who, but one that believed that *Christ was God*, could say with *St. Paul*, *I can do all things through Christ that strengtheth me*; or, with *St. Stephen*, at the instant of Death, cry out, *Lord Jesus receive my Spirit*.

From these, and many other Texts, it seems plain to me, that Christ was worshipped, and acknowledged as God; and that therefore he ought so to be worshipped, and acknowledged, we have all the same Reasons to believe, as we have that the Scriptures are True; the Establishment of a False Worship being a thorough Disproof of the Authority that Commands it.

Supposing therefore the Truth of the Scriptures, there's no way of eluding this Argument, but by giving

ving another Interpretation to all those Places which seem to ascribe divine Honour to Christ; which can no otherwise be done, than by framing a particular Dialect for this Purpose, and giving new Significations to Words, when applied to our *Saviour*, which they never had before, when used upon other Occasions.

I shall not enter upon a particular Proof of this, but pass on to

Another Argument I observ'd from Scripture, which gave me further Assurance of the *Divinity* of the *Son*, and consequently of the Truth of the whole Proposition before advanced; and that is, The Character of Jesus Christ considered *meerly as a Man*. Now 'tis certain, that the *Man Christ Jesus*, the *Son of David*, according to the *Flesh*, is represented by all the Evangelists, as having his Conversation in this World with all Lowliness, and Humility, and with perfect Holiness, and Unblameableness of Life. And it is not imaginable, that a Person of this Character should have suffered any Titles to have been given him, any Honour or Respect to have been pay'd him, which were not strictly and indispensably due to him; much less have taken the Honour and Worship, peculiar to God only, to himself, if he had not been infallibly conscious that of a Truth God dwelt in him. I cannot possibly conceive that one, who declined all Appearance of Grandeur, Dominion, and Authority, should have allowed of any thing that look'd like Worship, or Adoration, or might have been mistaken for it; or that he, who knew he was believed to be the Son of God, in such a Sense which some thought Blasphemy, would not have undeceived his Followers, and justified himself to his Enemies, had he not really been what 'twas Blasphemy to have pretended to be, if he were not.

I might easily pursue these Reflections a great deal further, and bring more Arguments to confirm the truth of what I have asserted, that these Names or Titles of *Father, Son, and Holy Ghost* are applyed in Scripture to the *One True God*; but I judge it altogether unnecessary, not only because it has been fully made out already in several set Discourses upon this Subject, but because it is so plainly and expressly revealed, that I am verily perswaded every Man that reads would believe, were it not for the additional Explications such a Belief is charged with.

3. Which is the next thing to be considered: And indeed here lyes the whole difficulty of the matter, the main stress of the Controversie. For that God should be called *Father, Son, and Holy Ghost*, is as easily to be believed, as that he should be called *Adonai, Elohim, and Jehovah*; That the same thing should be signified and expressed by several names, is no such incredible Mystery: But if we allow that these Terms, *Father, Son, and Holy Ghost*, are all applyed to God in Scripture, 'tis not thought sufficient to say, that these are three several Names which signifie God; but we are further required to believe that *God is One and Three, the same God, but three different Hypostases or Persons*; And that *one of these three Hypostases or Persons, is both God and Man*. These are the hard sayings which puzzles some Mens Understandings, and make them chuse rather to wrest and pervert the plainest Texts, than admit such seemingly inconsistent Consequences.

Here therefore I shall Examine, what grounds there are in *Scripture* for such an Exposition:

And what we are obliged from thence to believe when we express our Faith in this particular manner.

First

First then, as to these forms of Expression, That *God is One and Three, &c.* It is to be observed, that these Names, *Father, Son, and Holy Ghost*, are applyed to God in Scripture in a different way from what any of his other Names are : For the other Names of God signify only *Partial Conceptions* of the Divine Nature, such as Self-Existence, Power, &c. and are all contained within the same Idea of God ; and so are indifferently used upon any occasion to express the whole Idea of God to which they belong, which is the same under every denomination. These therefore cannot be the Foundation of any distinction in the Godhead : But *Father, Son, and Holy Ghost*, according to our way of conceiving things, signify something *Extrinsicall and Accessory* to the Divine Nature, as much as we know of the Divine Nature by reason, the whole Idea of God being conceived as full and compleat before the application of these terms ; And though all of them are separately and together affirmed of God, yet each of them in so peculiar a manner, that there are several occasions where when one of these terms is used with relation to God, 'twould be improper to use either of the other. From whence it follows, that these three Names of God, *Father, Son, and Holy Ghost*, must denote a *three-fold difference or distinction* belonging to God ; but such as is consistent with the *Unity and Simplicity* of the *Divine Nature*. For each of these Names includes the whole Idea we have of God and something more ; so far as they express the Nature of God, they all adequately and exactly signify the same ; 'tis the additional signification which makes all the distinction betwixt them.

What *particular kind or manner of distinction* this is, is not expressed in Scripture ; but since the Church has thought

thought fit to assign a Name for it, that of *Person* seems to me as proper and agreeable to the whole Tenor and Design of the Holy Writings, as any other that could have been chosen for that purpose. For *Father, Son, and Holy Ghost*, whether we consider the Primitive sense and intention of the words, the general and constant use of them, or the particular Connexion and Circumstances in which they are mentioned in Scripture, have plainly a *Personal Signification*; each of them, without any figure of Speech, being determined to signify *some intelligent Being Acting* in such a manner as is there related.

There needs no Proof of this, the plain *distinction* of *Persons* imported by those Terms being the chief Argument made use of to shew that they cannot all be applied to God, but must necessarily signify *Three distinct Beings*: But that they are all applied to God in Scripture, has been proved already; And therefore *Father, Son, and Holy Ghost* may be considered as *Persons* or *Personal Characters*, which do not imply any *distinction of Being or Nature*.

The Greeks are supposed to have meant the same by *Hypostases* as we do by *Person*; this word being sometimes the very Translation of the other; And if so, there's the same ground for the use of both: But if they meant any thing else, they could hardly have so good Warrant for it from Revelation.

Now, that one of these *Persons* or *Hypostases* should be *both God and Man*, there is this Foundation in the Scriptures for. He who is there called the *Son of God*, did certainly appear in the *likeness of Men*, being in all respects, Sin only excepted, truly and properly *Man*; as his *Birth, Necessities, Sufferings, and Death* sufficiently testify. 'Tis certain also that the same *Jesus Christ*,
who

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who was called the *Son of God*, and was made in the *likeness of Man*, is affirmed by *St. Paul*, Phil. 3. 7, 8. to have been in the *form of God*, when he took the *Nature of Man upon him*.

But besides this and many other Texts to the same effect, 'tis plain, from what before has been proved, that God did suffer himself to be worshipped and adored *in and by* the Man Christ Jesus: The least that can be inferred from which is, that God was more immediately and peculiarly *present in Christ*, than ever he is said to have been any where else: As in the *Heavens*, *Jewish Temple*, *between the Cherubims*, in *Prophets* and *Holy Men*, who spake as they were moved by the Spirit of God. What created Object was ever allowed to intercept the Worship paid to God, or share with him in it? Were the *Heavens*, the *Temple*, the *Cherubim* or *Prophets* to be adored? Nay, has not God taken a particular care to preserve Men from Idolatry, by forbidding them to Worship him *in or by* any sensible Representation? Did not the Apostles, who worship'd Christ, forbid others to Worship Men of like Passions with themselves, commanding them to direct all their Devotion to the Living God, who made Heaven and Earth? How then can we suppose that Christ was only a *meer Man*, or some other *Creature*, and not rather believe that he had the *Fulness of the Godhead* dwelling in him *bodily*? Acts 14.
ver. 15.

But here it is Objected; How can God and Man be united? And to this I must fairly Answer, that I cannot tell. I have confessed already in the Account I have given of those Notions of *Unity* and *Distinction*, that I have not any just or distinct Conceptions of the *Union* of *Spiritual Beings*, either *with Bodies*, or with *one another*: But this I will venture to say, that I can as well conceive

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conceive *God and Man* together under one *Idea*, at one view, as I can conceive a Soul and Body so united.

All that I know of the *Union of Soul and Body* is; that there is some Intelligent Power that makes use of the Organs of my Body, and Acts in conjunction with the Motions there produced. And I may as well consider God united to Man, when he so Acts by the Ministry and Operation of Man, that the Actions of God seem conveyed to us the same way as the Actions of one Man are to another. Had those who upon some occasions spake by the extraordinary Assistance of a Divine Power been constantly so directed, and assisted, how would they have distinguished the *Motions of their Souls* from the *Impressions of God*? And why then should not we think such an *Extraordinary Power* as this as much united to such Men, as that *Common ordinary Power* we call the *Soul* is to those Bodies in which it acts and exerts it self?

Some have been of Opinion, that what we call the *Soul*, is nothing else but a *constant regular Inspiration*, or a determinate Concurrence of God Almighty with such and such Motions and Capacities of Matter: But whether this be so or no, as most probably it is not, it seems to me very plain from Scripture, that such a Power which we ascribe to God, did as *Constantly* and *Regularly* Act in and through *Christ*, as the Human Soul is perceived to do in any other Man: As appears from his absolute security from all manner of Sin and Error, from his constant knowledge of the Thoughts and Designs of Men, and the Will and Decrees of God; and from his Readiness and Ability to work Miracles at any time, and upon any occasion. All which are manifest Tokens of an uninterrupted Presence and Concurrence of the Deity: Especially if we consider the Calmness and Evenness

Evenness of Spirit observable in our Saviour, entirely free from all the transports of over-ruling Impressions, 'tis a further Argument that he did not receive the Spirit of God *at times*, or *by measure*; but was as conscious of all the Divine Perfections in himself as a Man is conscious of his own Thoughts.

Such are the Grounds we find in Scripture for those particular Explications of the Trinity before-mentioned.

In the next place, we are to Enquire what the Scriptures necessarily oblige us to believe in this Point.

But before this Question can be resolved, there are two things to be premised:

1. That whatever Articles of Faith are absolutely necessary to Salvation, all Persons of every Rank and Condition are equally obliged to believe them. There is not one Religion for the Peasant, and another for the Scholar: We have the same general Rule to walk by, though particular Obligations may be greater or lesser, fewer or more, according to different Circumstances and Relations. And whatever Principles and Duties are of general Necessity, ought to be so plainly revealed, as to be easily understood by ordinary Capacities upon a fair and careful Examination.

2. That in order to this end it seems to have been the Design of the Scriptures to represent God in a *sensible manner*; though at the same time they take care to assure us that God is in his own Nature a Being of different Perfections not conceivable by Human Understanding: And is thus represented only in condescension to our weakness, for the help and assistance of our Devotion. So that all Expressions of this kind, where God is the Subject, are to be understood in a *higher* and *more Spiritual* sense, but still with some Analogy to

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what they *properly* and *usually* signifie. Thus, to use a common Instance, when 'tis said, that God *looks down* and *beholds* what's done among the Children of Men; that he *hears* the Cries of the Righteous, and the Blasphemies of the Wicked, 'tis not to be imagined that he sees as Man sees, that he makes use of any Organs of Sense; but 'tis thus expressed to give us more lively Notions and Impressions of the *certainly* of God's *Universal Knowledge*; to assure us that God more *plainly*, *fully*, and *infallibly* knows whatever is done in all the Earth, than we are capable of knowing those things which fall within the reach of our Senses.

This being premised, it seems very plain to me that the Doctrine of the Trinity is not to be look'd upon as a nice abstracted Speculation designed for the Exercise of our Understandings; but as a plainer Revelation of God's Love and Good Will towards Men, and a greater Motive and Incitement to Piety than any we had before this Doctrine was delivered.

Had man stood confirmed in his *Original Righteousness*, and there had been no need of *Redemption*, 'tis highly probable God had never been considered by Man in his *state of Probation* under any such Distinction as is now revealed to us; And therefore I should think those *different Titles* and *Relations* by which God has been pleased to express that *Eternal Distinction* in the Godhead to us, should be chiefly considered by us with reference to the great Work of Man's Salvation.

Thus far then the *Scriptures* require us to believe; That the *One only Supreme God* upon his fore-knowledge of *Man's Fall*, did from all Eternity Purpose and Decree to *Redeem* Mankind into a capacity of Salvation, by the *Death* and constant *Mediation* of a *Man* chosen and enabled for this Work by *the fulness of the Godhead dwelling*

dwelling in him : And in consideration of his *Passion* and *Intercession*, to impart such *Gifts*, *Graces*, and *Spiritual Assistances*, as would be sufficient to render this *Redemption* effectual to the *Saving* of much People.

And moreover we are to believe that God has accordingly executed this his Gracious Design towards us : By sending into the World *Christ Jesus*, the *Man* who before he had ordained, should in the Fulness of Time *be born*, and *suffer* for our Sins; *in* and *by* whom, as has already been shewn, God *acted* in a wonderful manner, was *worshipped* and *adored*, and *acknowledged* in all his *Attributes*; and with whom he abideth in the Fulness of Power and Glory for ever : And, since his *Death* and *Reception* into Heaven, *by* a plentiful *Effusion* of *Spiritual Graces and Influences*; by which means a great many have *embraced the Gospel of Christ*, and become *Heirs of Salvation*, and more from henceforth to the end of all things shall daily be *added to the Church of God*, be *supported in the Faith*, and be made *Partakers of the purchased Inheritance* reserved in Heaven for those that are *Sanctified* by the *Spirit of God*.

Now, with respect to this great Design of Saving Mankind, and the Order and Method of the Divine Wisdom in the Execution of it; To give us as full and distinct Apprehensions as our Souls are able to conceive of the Misery of our sinful Condition, the difficulty of Deliverance, and the unspeakable Mercy of God in restoring us to the Happiness we had justly forfeited; and to raise our Souls to the highest pitch of Veneration, Love, and Gratitude we are capable of expressing for such an inestimable Blessing; God has been pleased to reveal himself to us under several *Personal Characters and Relations*: Such as *Father*, *Son*, and *Holy Ghost*; *Saviour*, *Mediator*, and *Comforter*. By which

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Names, and all other Expressions consequent thereupon, we are directed to consider some such *kind of Distinction*, and *Su'ordination of Offices and Relations* in God, as the Terms made use of do commonly import.

Thus when God is pleased to represent his Love to Mankind, in the highest Image of Nature; that of a Father sacrificing an only well-beloved Son, the exact Transcript and Resemblance of himself, perfectly Innocent, and Obedient to his Will in all Things; we are to believe that, by the *Sufferings and Death of Christ*, God has given greater Proofs of his Love towards us than any Man is capable of doing to another; and that such an Action of an Earthly Parent suggests the nearest and likest Conception we can possibly frame, of what our *Heavenly-Father* has done for us; tho' at the same time we must acknowledge it comes infinitely short of expressing the Riches and Fulness of his Mercy and Loving-kindness.

And the same Use and Spiritual Improvement is to be made of all other Revelations of this nature.

And thus we have seen how far we are capable of *conceiving* a Trinity, and what the *Scriptures expressly oblige us to believe* concerning this Point.

All that is beyond, lies far out of our Reach and Comprehension, and no *particular Explications* can add any thing to our Faith; for the Terms made use of for that End, being in use before this Doctrine was taught, must either signify the same they did before, or not: If the same, where's the Mystery? If not, what do they signify? Something that we cannot explain but in Words used already, and then the Question will return again. The same Difficulty would attend new Terms invented on purpose; for either they would have no meaning at all affixed to them, or else they would

would be understood in the sense of some other in use before. And therefore, had the very same Terms and Forms of Expression been found in the *Scriptures*, as are now in our *Creeeds*, the Revelation of the Trinity had been no plainer, nor we obliged to believe any farther than the present Language does import: For upon a fair and distinct Examination both of *Scripture* and *Reason*, it plainly appears, that what's already revealed amounts to as much as we are capable of conceiving, and does besides imply something more which we cannot comprehend; and 'tis not in the Power of Language to make us understand any thing better: For 'tis utterly impossible to frame any Notions above our own Level. And should God be pleased to stamp some new Idea's upon the Minds of Men, they could not be conveyed to others by the help of Words, or any other Signs, but only by the same Divine Impressions: so that whatever Idea's the Apostles, and Inspired Writers, might have of a Trinity by *immediate Infusion*, the Terms they have made use of can give us but this imperfect Discovery of them, that they were such as we are not able to comprehend without the like Assistance.

This then is the utmost we are *required to believe*, or are *capable of believing*, concerning the Doctrine of the Trinity; *viz.* That these *Three different Terms*, *Father*, *Son*, and *Holy Ghost*, are all applied in Scripture to the *One only Supreme God*; That all the *Actions*, *Offices*, and *Relations*, which are in Scripture ascribed to any of these Names, (excepting those proper to the *Humane Nature* of Christ) are there plainly *attributed*, and do *truly belong to one, and the same Divine Nature*; That there are such frequent and evident Assertions of the *Unity of God* in Scripture, and yet such plain Expressions of *distinction*, signified by these Terms, *Father*,

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ther, Son, and Holy Ghost, as imply a consistency of unity and distinction in the Godhead.

That this Distinction, whatever it be, is *not the same* with that we conceive betwixt the Attributes of God; which are partial Conceptions of his Essence, nor a *meer difference* of Name, Office, or Relation, such as is signified by the like Terms; when applied to Men, (tho' these are all the Differences we can *expressly conceive*, as applicable to the Divine Nature) but some *other Distinction*, which we have but a *confused perception of*, and cannot comprehend or explain by any particular Idea's; which *unknown inexplicable Distinction* is the Foundation of all these Differences *expressly conceived* by us.

And since the Church has thought fit, for the Sake of Unity and Peace, and for the Suppressing all Private Disputes and Interpretations, to appoint *set Forms* to express *this our Faith* in, I think the *Athanasian Creed* as rational an Explication of the *Trinity* as can well be made. The Worst that the Enemies of this Doctrine can say of it, is, That it is an unnecessary Multiplication of Terms, and too nice an Endeavour to Explain what cannot be Explained; but not that 'tis False, or Absurd; nothing being there asserted in any sense inconsistent with the *Unity of God*, or the *Principles of Right Reason*: All such Meanings and Significations of any Terms or Expressions in that Creed being very improper, as they are there applied, and utterly disclaimed by the Church that enjoins the Use of it.

Nor can it be esteemed an unreasonable Imposition, That we should be obliged to profess our Faith of something which cannot be *conceived*, but *confusedly* and *indistinctly*; nor *expressed*, but in *general and obscure Terms*. For where's the Hardship of being required to believe as far as we can believe? God is Incomprehensible in
his

his Nature and Perfections, but are we not obliged to believe there is a God who is Incomprehensible? Are we not obliged to believe there are Joys in Heaven, which it has not enter'd into the Heart of Man to conceive? And, to repeat a former Instance, may not a Blind Man be obliged to believe what a Friend of unsuspected Integrity tells him of the *general nature* of Colour, tho' he is not able to form a *particular Idea* of it? And, if these Things cannot be denied, What difference can be assigned why we should not be under as great an Obligation of believing the Trinity, tho' we are not able to conceive it distinctly?

A Threefold Distinction in the Godhead, consistent with the Unity of God, is as plainly revealed in Scripture as any other Article of Faith: Nor are those *general Abstracted Terms* we find in our Creeds, to be condemn'd as meer useless and perplexing Niceties; for tho' they are not sufficient to make us *understand* the Trinity *fully and distinctly*, yet they are *proper Limitations* to exclude all the False and Unworthy Apprehensions of this Doctrine, which Pretenders to a more particular Explication might introduce.

III. And now what dangerous Consequences can possibly attend such a Faith as this? 'Tis true indeed, the Adversaries of the Trinity have drawn up a heavy Charge against this Doctrine, and taken a great deal of Liberty in their Discourses about it: But the principal Objections that have been made by any of them are but Three; to which all the rest may be reduced: And these I shall endeavour to shew, by the Account before given, are very Frivolous and Unjust.

I. The first Pernicious Consequence the Doctrine of the Trinity stands charged with, is, the Introduction
of

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of a *Plurality of Gods*: But 'tis very plain from what we have said in the former part of this Discourse, that 'tis utterly impossible to believe a Trinity in any such sense as implies a Plurality of Gods: For according to the Notions I have there shewed we have of the Nature and Attributes of God, 'tis undeniably certain to every Man's Experience, that we cannot conceive more than One God: All our Endeavours to comprehend more are only repetitions of the same Idea.

Let Those therefore take care to Answer this Accusation, who, under pretence of giving a more Rational Account of what we are to believe in this Point, set up *created subordinate Gods* to be Partners with their Maker in the Glory and Worship due to him.

Besides, we do explicitly declare, that there is but *One God* at the same time we make Profession of our Faith in a *Trinity*, or *Three Persons*.

2. In the next place, therefore we are accused of believing *Contradictions*; and consequently of destroying all the certainty of Natural Knowledge: Which Fence being down, there's no Error so gross or absurd but may be obtruded upon us; and *Transubstantiation* has as good a Pretence to be an Article of our Faith as the *Trinity*. But I need not make any particular Answer to this Objection, having proved at large already, that we neither do nor can believe a Trinity in any sense that contradicts the plain and evident Principles of Natural Reason. We do not believe there can be *more Gods than One*, that *One can be Three in the same respect 'tis One*; or that *One God can be Three Persons in the same sense three Men are three Persons*; or any other Proposition that's inconsistent with those Natural Notions which are the Foundation of all our other Knowledge. But the Patrons of *Transubstantiation* cannot make

make this Plea, who in this one Particular deny those very Principles which upon all other occasions they rely upon with the greatest Assurance. Did they only affirm, that Christ was *present* in that Sacrament in some way or manner they could not comprehend, but in no way repugnant to the plain and necessary Dictates of well-informed Sense, and right Reason, there might be then some Resemblance found betwixt this Doctrine and that of the Trinity; but at present the Comparison is palpably and notoriously unjust.

3. But Thirdly, 'tis further Objected, That though the Doctrine of the Trinity, as we explain it, could not be proved to contain down-right Contradictions; yet at least it must be counted and esteemed as a *Mystery*, and the Imposition of *Mysteries* for Articles of Faith, is a thing of very ill Consequence.

In Answer to which Charge, it is to be observed, that as in the Doctrine of the Trinity, so in most other Objects of Faith and Knowledge, there's something that we plainly and certainly understand, and something that we cannot possibly comprehend: Thus a Man by inward Reflection is Infallibly conscious of his own Thoughts, and he judges, whatever he perceives within himself, to proceed from one *Common Principle*, which he calls his *Soul*; and which, from the Nature of its Operations, he is fully perswaded is *something of a different kind* from his Body, tho' it always Acts in consent with it: But *what this Soul is*, or in *what manner united to his Body*, he is not able to conceive; and therefore the *Doctrine of the Human Soul*, taken all together, may as justly be stiled a *Mystery*, as the Trinity. We ought not then to be offended at the word *Mystery*, since, if we strictly examine our thoughts, we shall find that almost every thing we pretend to know, comes under

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that name, even those things we have the greatest Assurance of, our very *Souls and Beings*.

This being observed, we may consider *the Trinity* either with respect to what may be understood of it, or what cannot: So far as we are *capable of conceiving a Trinity*, 'tis *no Mystery*, and consequently no Oppression of our Faith; And so far as it *cannot be comprehended*, it does not bind us to any *Explicit Act of Faith*: As is plain from what has been said before concerning the *Nature of Faith*, and the *Persons obliged to believe* this Article: For all things necessary to Salvation are to be believed by all sorts of Men; and nothing can be believed any farther than the terms in which it is proposed are understood: But a *Mystery* cannot be brought down to the lowest Capacities, and be delivered in Terms that are plainly and distinctly understood, for then it would be no longer a *Mystery*: So far therefore as we are *obliged to believe*, is *no Mystery*; For whatever Terms I am bid to believe a thing in I cannot comprehend, I can mean no more but that I believe it to be in some manner I cannot comprehend: And I am sure there's no difficulty or danger in believing that there are some things which we are not able to find out, or comprehend.

These are the Reflections which offered themselves upon a careful and impartial Consideration of this Subject.

But here I fore-see it may be asked, What do we understand more of the Trinity now than we did before? What new Hypothesis is here advanced to solve all the Difficulties of that Doctrine by? In Answer to which Objection, I have this further to add for the Justification of the foregoing Discourse.

First, That the Principal Design of my Enquiries was, to know, what God required us all to believe in order

order to our Salvation, not how far the Soul of Man was capable of discovering the deep things of God: For I am fully perswaded, that there may be things necessary to be believed, and yet we not obliged to believe them, in that *distinct particular sense* in which some Learned Men have explained them; Though their Hypothesis should be very Rational and Consistent, and perhaps really true. And therefore could there be any new way found out of making the *Trinity* conceivable by Human Understanding, I do not think we should be under any Obligation of believing that particular Exposition of it: For besides the difficulty of such abstracted Notions, even in their plainest dress, with respect to mean Capacities, which are all equally concerned in necessary Articles of Faith, it cannot be imagined that we should be obliged to believe more than the Christians who lived before us were; that more should be necessary to our Salvation than was to theirs: And 'tis certain their Faith was sufficient and effectual for obtaining Eternal Life, who could not possibly believe what we suppose to be but lately discovered.

But 2dly, Considering that we were permitted with Humility and Reverence to Exercise our Souls in the search of Divine Knowledge; And moreover that we ought as Christians, as well as Men, to give a Reason of the Faith we profess, and defend it against all false and unjust Imputations; I have also made it my business to enquire, how far we were capable of forming distinct Conceptions of a *Trinity*; And upon Enquiry found that after a Faithful Tryal of our Faculties, and a strict Examination of all the *simple* Notions which make up the Proposition to be believed, we cannot arrive at greater Knowledge in this Point than our fore-fathers have done; And that so much of the Doctrine of the Trinity as

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was a *Mystery* to them; is like to be so to the end of the World.

Which if I have as fully and sufficiently proved to others as I am convinced of it my self, I shall not think my Time or Labour lost upon this Subject. For next to understanding a thing thoroughly is to know we cannot understand it; next to resolving a Problem in Mathematics, is to demonstrate it cannot be done. Our Souls are as much at rest, our Desires as quiet, and all our Designs and Pursuits as much at an end when we despair of Victory, as when we actually Conquer.

And therefore if these be the *true and proper Limits* of our *Faith* and *Knowledge* which I have assigned; If I have given a Just Account of what we are *required to believe* concerning the Trinity; How much 'tis *possible* for us to *believe* of it, and how far we are capable of having *distinct Conceptions* about it; 'tis in vain to search for new Notions and Hypotheses, which may probably puzzle or deceive our Understandings, but can never lead us farther into the Knowledge of the Trinity.

But I will not pretend to measure the Abilities of other Men by my own: I shall only say this more, which I am sure I can truly affirm, that I have taken all the care imaginable to deliver *my Judgment impartially and sincerely*, and have not dared to *impose* any thing upon *others*, which I do not *believe my self*, or is any ways inconsistent with the Principles of right Reason.

POST-SCRIPT.

These Papers were in the Press, and every Word in the Book, and Preface, as they stand now, was Written before His Majesty's Injunctions came forth: The Author is glad to find that he has not transgress'd 'em; the Authority and Reasonableness of which he pays such a Submission to, that if he had not prescribed to himself the same Rules in Writing, that he now sees enjoyned by his Superiours, he wou'd have shew'd his Obedience to 'em, by Suppressing what he had written.

F I N I S.

